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Security Council Said to Be Weakest When Breaking New Ground or Handling Controversy

President Has Not Received Sharp Debate or Major New Ideas From 20 Officials Who Usually Attend Meetings, Expert Declares After Study.

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WASHINGTON, May 9.

THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL, as an advisory agency to the President, has been at its weakest when dealing with extremely controversial questions and in breaking new ground that requires major revisions of foreign policy.

This criticism of the highest administrative agency in the Government became known today with the release of closed session testimony of Dr. James A. Perkins, vice president of the Carnegie Corporation and a member of the Gaither committee, before the Senate subcommittee on national policy machinery last month.

Perkins testified, as an expert who has had access to NSC top secret papers and has worked with subordinate NSC planning and operations groups. He attended one NSC meeting.

Democratic Senator Henry M. Jackson of Washington, chairman of the subcommittee, said that Perkins spoke "with an impressive background of experience in the relations of science and technology to national security."

"He was formerly deputy chairman of the Research and Development Board of the Department of Defense. He is a trustee of the Institute for Defense Analysis and chairman of the study group on strategy and foreign policy of the Council on Foreign Relations. He also served on the Gaither committee, appointed by President Eisenhower in 1957 to survey national security problems."

THE GAITHER REPORT is still a secret document. Some of its findings and recommendations, however, have become known, mostly critical of the State and Defense departments and the NSC.

Perkins' NSC testimony was given April 23 and was cleared for publication by the White House. Jackson's office said there were "only a few editorial corrections, nothing substantial."

Like former Defense Secretary Robert A. Lovett and other witnesses before the subcommittee, Perkins criticized the NSC organization, which includes a planning staff and operations coordination board with ramifications down through the Government, as unwieldy and too much devoted to committees.

Under questioning by the subcommittee's Republican counsel, Perkins said he was criticizing the NSC system rather than its operations solely under the Eisenhower Administration.

Asked by Jackson for his opinion on the effectiveness of the council as an advisory mechanism, Perkins replied:

"The NSC is a very large organization that does a great deal of work. It is well established and has been at its best in matters that are extremely controversial and break new ground or that require major revisions of policy."

THE TESTIMONY developed that usually 20 high-ranking officials attend the weekly NSC meetings at the White House. The President is chairman and the ranking members are Vice President Nixon, Secretary of State Christian A. Herter, Defense Secretary Thomas S. Gates Jr., and Leo A. Hoench, director of the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization. Other participants include Treasury Secretary Robert B. Anderson, Budget Director Maurice H. Stans, Central Intelligence Director Allen W. Dulles and Gordon Gray, the President's special assistant for national security affairs. Others attending are Gen. Nathan F. Twining, Joint Chiefs of Staff, or his representative, and White House specialists on science, economic and foreign aid.

Because the group is so large and considers such diverse subjects, much of the preliminary planning and later operational work is assigned to committees, mostly in the subordinate groups.

Perkins gave this estimate of the system:

"When you get a committee of operators they have enormous ongoing programs and responsibilities, both in defense, state and elsewhere, and they find it very difficult to deal with large innovations of policy or program."

"I think if I were to make a general judgment about the NSC, it is that the President has not received from the normal NSC routine the kind of sharp debate, the clear differences of opinion, the new ideas that would require major modifications of program. However, I think that he has been well served by a group that has stabilized operations and stabilized them by seeing that all parts of the government are drawn into the process of policy planning."

PERKINS SAID that, when the Gaither committee began its investigation in 1957, neither the

President nor Central Intelligence had received a realistic appraisal of the Russian economic, political and propaganda achievements.

"The government," he observed, "did not have its eyes open in the summer and the fall of 1957," and added:

"I would say we are not currently organized to see to it that conditions that run counter to strong preconceptions are kicked to the top and put on the top of the (NSC) agenda."

Testifying that too little attention has been given to the non-military components of a total defense posture, he elaborated:

"We might find that we have an absolutely invulnerable deterrent, and we might even find that we have an airlift system that meets our limited war requirements to the best possible reasonable measure. But then we could discover that the Soviet's real thrust was in the field of ideology and economics. If we have starved our information office or have not appropriated enough funds for military assistance, we might be in the position of having locked the front door very well only to discover we had not even put up the screens in the back."

THE WITNESS said the imbalance in favor of military over non-military factors may have resulted because "civilians as bargainers in this complex thing called national security policy are not as well or as broadly prepared as their military counterparts."

Civilians in the State and Defense Departments, he observed, do not have the full range of briefing, training and expertise as the military who have the enormous advantage of what may seem to be the more present danger.

Part of the lack of long-range civilian planning, Perkins conceded, might be due to short-range budgetary considerations. He did not agree entirely with previous testimony that the Treasury secretary and budget director carried too much weight in national security policy.